

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2492

INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS

C O N F I D E N T I A L THESSALONIKI 0666

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GR

SUBJECT: KARAMANLIS IN NORTHERN GREECE

1. PRIME MINISTER KARAMANLIS WAS IN NORTHERN GREECE FOR THREE DAYS (NOV 22-24) TO DELIVER A CALL FOR NATIONAL UNITY AND DOMESTIC POLITICAL PEACE, AND TO DISPLAY HIS PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE AREA. THE POLITICAL MESSAGE WAS FIRST DELIVERED TO A LARGE RALLY IN KAVALLA SHORTLY AFTER HIS ARRIVAL NOV 22. HE NAMED THE PRIORITY NATIONAL GOALS AS "OUR NATIONAL SECURITY, THE CONSOLIDATION OF DEMOCRACY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ECONOMY." TO ACHIEVE THESE, HE SAID, WOULD REQUIRE "ABOVE ALL, NATIONAL UNITY, DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY, AND, OBVIOUSLY, SACRIFICES ON ALL SIDES." "IT WOULD BE A CRIME", HE SAID, "TO PROVOKE A SPLIT IN THE COUNTRY'S INTERNAL FRONT WHEN WE HAVE AN OPEN EXTERNAL FRONT." KARAMANLIS REPEATED VARIATIONS OF THIS THEME DURING PUBLIC MEETINGS AT SERRES AND THESSALONIKI, THE TWO OTHER MAJOR STOPS OF HIS VISIT.

2. THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ASPECT OF THE TRIP CENTERED ON THE EXPLOITATION OF THE AREA'S MINERAL RESOURCES.

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THE MOST IMPORTANT OF THESE WERE IDENTIFIED AS OIL, GOLD, URANIUM, AND LIGNITE. KARAMANLIS VISITED AN OIL

DRILLING RIG NEAR KAVALLA AND AN EMBRYONIC GOLD MINING OPERATION NEARBY. HE EXTENDED HIS TRIP FOR ONE DAY TO VISIT KOZANI AND PTOLEMAIS IN WESTERN MACEDONIA WHERE EXTENSIVE LIGNITE DEPOSITS ARE BEING DEVELOPED FOR A LARGE POWER PLANT AND A LIGNITE CONVERSION FACILITY TO PRODUCE FERTILIZER. THROUGHOUT THE VISIT, THE NEED FOR MORE RAPID DEVELOPMENT OF THESE RESOURCES WAS REITERATED, AND THE EXPANSION OF GOG EFFORTS TOWARDS THIS GOAL WAS STRESSED. THE THEME WAS REPEATED SO OFTEN THAT ONE PAPER ("THESSALONIKI") HEADLINED "THE ENTIRE COUNTRY WILL BE DUG UP" FOR THE EXPLOITATION OF MINERAL WEALTH.

3. KARAMANLIS ALSO GOT CARRIED AWAY INTO HYPERBOLE FOLLOWING HIS VISIT TO WESTERN MACEDONIA WHERE PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE HE ANNOUNCED THAT "I HAVE TAKEN A BATH IN OPTIMISM" AND THE KOZANI/PTOLEMAIS AREA "HAS BEEN TRANSFORMED INTO THE RUHR OF THE BALKANS."

4. KARAMANLIS REMAINS EXTREMELY POPULAR IN NORTHERN GREECE EVEN THOUGH A PREDOMINANT LOCAL SENTIMENT IS THAT "ATHENS" PAYS NO ATTENTION TO THE AREA. THE LENGTH OF KARAMANLIS' VISIT, ITS EMPHASIS ON INTERNAL POLITICAL STABILITY AND THE GOG'S INTERESTS IN NORTHERN GREECE'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT WERE OBVIOUSLY INTENDED TO MAINTAIN THE PRIME MINISTER'S POPULARITY HERE. THE ENTHUSIASTIC RECEPTION HE RECEIVED INDICATES THAT THIS SUCCEEDED IN DAMPENING LOCAL RESENTMENT OVER ATHENS' ALLEGED NEGLECT, ALTHOUGH PERIODIC TRIPS OF THIS TYPE WILL CONTINUE TO BE NECESSARY FOR KARAMANLIS TO MAINTAIN HIS STRONG POLITICAL BASE HERE. NEGROPONTE

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